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ABSTRACT

Foreign language educators should make themselves known in the field of bilingual education because they have a good deal to offer. While bilingual education differs basically from foreign language programs in that it entails the use of two languages for all or part of the curriculum and not simply instruction in the language as such, it does include some very important elements of foreign language instruction. One of the disappointing features of some bilingual education programs in Texas is that people who do not have a strong background in Spanish are making many mistakes and the children are perpetuating these errors. Bilingual teachers must have preparation in language teaching and linguistics, and the teacher preparation program at the University of Texas is attempting to give teachers this preparation. The expertise that the foreign language field has acquired over the years can be shared effectively with people in bilingual education. Foreign language educators should find out what services they can render the language component. They should be sympathetic and of service to the concept of bilingual education. (CFM)

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The Role of Foreign Language Educators in Bilingual Education

George M. Blanco

I'd like to share some thoughts with you today concerning the role of foreign language educators in this relatively new field of bilingual education. Perhaps some of you are presently in bilingual education or are simply interested in it and want to find out more. As Pat indicated to you, my background really is in foreign languages. I have been a foreign language teacher and an elementary school teacher teaching all subject areas, and then later I worked for the Texas Education Agency in the area of foreign languages. Therefore, I think that I can speak from personal experience in terms of the role between foreign languages and bilingual education. There has been so much said lately, and you have seen the interest in bilingual education reflected in newspapers and the professional literature. Such organizations as the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, TESOL, and even the National Association of Teachers of Mathematics are getting interested in bilingual education, and I think that it is very timely that we in the foreign language field start doing something about our positive role as to our contributions in this very important area.

Let me just define in general terms what we consider bilingual education to be and how it differs from regular foreign language instruction. Basically, bilingual education is the use of two languages for all or part of the curriculum — that's in its basic form; of course from there we have many variations. A foreign language program, on the other hand, is simply instruction in the language as such; that is, the language instruction becomes the subject matter. Certainly a bilingual education program is not a foreign language program, but it does include some very important elements of foreign language instruction. It is not an ESL program exclusively, but it includes some important elements from it. It is not a hap-hazard use of two languages; that is, we are not going to start using one language whenever we feel like it and use the other one just whenever we feel like it, although in my visitation to schools I have often found this to be the case, unfortunately.

Let us move into what we mean about bilingualism, again in very general terms. Of course, nobody can be more qualified than yourselves to define bilingualism, and we can simply define it as the ability to understand and speak two languages: to function in two languages. Bruce Gaarder, whose work you may have read, defines two types of bilingualism: elitist bilingualism, which is obtained voluntarily through study, travel, etc. Many of you fall in that category. The other is folk bilingualism, which is acquired through necessity at home or in the streets. I would

also propose a third category, and that is a combination of both, whereby we have native speakers of Spanish, for example, who grow up speaking Spanish and then go on to major in the language and acquire some intellectual functioning in that particular language.

Let us put all this together and see what this means to us in the field of bilingual education. For those of you who haven't visited bilingual programs, let me describe a typical bilingual situation to you. Let us assume that school "X" is required to have a bilingual education program, either because of Senate Bill 121, passed by the Texas Legislature, which is requiring schools to have bilingual programs, or because of the Lau vs. Nichols, a Supreme Court case. We have the principal, a Mr. Smith, who notices that he has Ms. Pérez on his staff. Well, as everybody knows, Ms. Pérez is a Mexican-American and she grew up speaking Spanish; therefore she is "qualified" to be in the bilingual program. Ms. Pérez is put in the bilingual program to start teaching in Spanish; then all of these concepts which have been familiar up to now suddenly become Ms. Pérez' Waterloo. Why? Simply because she does not have the technical vocabulary to deal with these subjects in Spanish. The situation is one in which Ms. Pérez grew up speaking Spanish, as many of us did at home, where we spoke a home dialect of the language, but yet there were certain topics we never dealt with, such as mathematical concepts or historical terms. Therefore, much of this vocabulary was learned only in English. Now, all of a sudden the teacher is expected to know such things as "overhead projector" and "competency-based teacher education." Having to know all this terminology in Spanish, is really putting Ms. Pérez in a very threatening position, a very unfair position.

As I go around the state visiting bilingual programs, sometimes I am absolutely appalled — not appalled — I am really disappointed to see a lot of mistakes being made by people who do not have a strong background in the language. I see such things as comenzar spelled with an s , puerta written with an accent, and árbol without an accent. The children repeat and write these items, and the mistakes are perpetuated. Teachers in bilingual programs, a hypothetical teacher like Ms. Pérez, are being asked constantly to make linguistic judgments. They come up and ask me: "What word should we use, papalote, cometa, huila or what?" In other words, bilingual teachers are suddenly being thrust into a linguistic situation for which they are not prepared. You, as foreign language teachers, have been steeped in linguistics, language teaching methodology, and the theory of second language learning. I saw an interview on film in which a teacher was going on about the fact that she was now teaching in a bilingual program and that her kids had learned to use the word rojo, whereas before they were using the "incorrect" word colorado. I just sat there and thought, "colorado is as correct as rojo is," but probably the teacher made that statement because most of the books coming out of Latin America prefer the word rojo, therefore she just assumed that the word that she grew up with was wrong.

Again, we are having teachers being very unsure about what is "correct Spanish" and what is "incorrect Spanish." We asked the teachers what they want the child to learn in Spanish, if they want to increase the child's vocabulary. Nothing is ever mentioned about syntax, phonology, or morphology. These are things that you are so familiar with; yet elementary teachers who have not had training in linguistics or language teaching usually tend to think of language simply as vocabulary; therefore, they simply concentrate on vocabulary and very often leave all these other areas to fall by the wayside.

I feel that bilingual education is based on the premise that the mother tongue is the best medium of instruction. We go through the usual motions of listening, speaking, reading, and writing — the things that you have been doing for so long. This is fine when we are dealing with children who are Spanish dominant, but as I go around the state, I also notice so many children in bilingual programs who happen to be Mexican-American but are not Spanish dominant. They are English dominant. Along the border in Laredo, Brownsville, El Paso, and Del Río, there are still a lot of children who are Spanish dominant; but in Austin, Dallas, or Fort Worth I think we are fooling ourselves if we think that most of the children in bilingual programs are Spanish dominant; yet we go on as if they were. We take this little child and start presenting Spanish instruction to him, reading instruction, that is, as if he didn't speak a word of English. So there we are reinventing the wheel all over again. We have learned nothing from our experiences in FLES or from our experiences in teaching a second language at the high school and at the university levels.

I really think that a major part of the confusion and turmoil that we are going through in bilingual education right now is largely a linguistic one. Bilingual teachers are being asked to be language teachers to a large extent, although not exclusively, and yet their preparation in language teaching and linguistics is very minimal, if at all; and this of course, is compounded by a lack of a knowledge of linguistics on the part of the administration. Again, I think it is a tremendous disservice to the cause of bilingual education to assume that simply because a person's name is Blanco, Pérez, or Ramírez that the person can automatically function in both languages in all areas as if he had been brought up and educated in both. I really think this is a big mistake, and the program suffers because of it. The reality is what Bruce Gaarder has said, that in essence we have folk bilingualism, but yet we want the outcome to be elitist bilingualism. We are trying to teach children a standard or world variety of, in this case, Spanish, because all of the books that are being used are produced in the United States, Spain, or Spanish America, and for the most part they do use a standard variety of Spanish. However, when the teacher opens up the teacher's manual and sees all of this pedagogical terminology in Spanish, she says, "I can't cope with it; I am having difficulty understanding it." I think it's signifi-

cant that the Center for Applied Linguistics in its publication called Guidelines for the Preparation and Certification of Teachers of Bilingual Bicultural Education makes as its No. 1 recommendation the following, that it considers basic for any bilingual teacher. It says that the teacher should demonstrate the ability to (1) communicate effectively both in speaking and understanding in the languages and within the cultures of both the home and the school. This ability will include adequate control of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, regional stylistic and non-verbal variants appropriate to the communication context, and (2) carry out instruction in all areas of the curriculum, using a standard variety of both languages. That's its No. 1 recommendation, because without the linguistic element, without the language, we simply cannot have a bilingual program. We cannot operate a bilingual program by somebody who has only a passive knowledge of the language. We need individuals who are able to communicate effectively in the language.

Let me describe to you — and you will see the elements from foreign languages — some of these things that we are trying to do in the teacher preparation program here at The University of Texas. This program is in the College of Education; however, notice, to begin with, we give the students who are coming into the program at the freshman or sophomore level a language proficiency test. That's basic. We used to give the MLA proficiency test, but because of its being very literary in nature I no longer use it; so we have developed our own, one that begins with an oral interview. Then the students listen to recordings of dialogs or conversations, voiced by native speakers from Texas, using a standard variety of the language. There is a listening part, reading and writing, and then another speaking part. So, right from the very beginning the individuals must be proficient in the language; and if they are not, this test will indicate certain areas of weaknesses to us. The undergraduate course which I teach in bilingual education is given completely in Spanish in the College of Education. When we first started out, people complained about it. What is this business about teaching in Spanish in the College of Education?" But yet because I feel that the language component is so important and if our students do not get this exposure to much of the vocabulary of a standard variety of the language while at the unviersity, where are they going to get it? So all of their assignments, all of their tests, everything is done in Spanish. Now, as I tell them at the beginning of the course, I will allow them to use half English and half Spanish. I say, "You will make a conscientious effort that as the course progresses you will use more and more Spanish, whereby by the middle of the course it's going to be all Spanish on your part." On my part that's all I ever use, unless I get stuck with a word like competency-based teacher education; then I have to paraphrase, but it does keep me on my toes in that I am constantly having to look up all these words in such references as the Enciclopedia técnica de la educación, published by Santillana.

Second, each time we meet I give them a dictation. Shades of foreign language teaching! Again, this is to have them practice their spelling so that they will put an accent on árbol and not on puerta, and spell all these things correctly. Third, my class is field based, meaning that it is taught at Zavala School actually. We bring in children to my class and our students — our university students — tutor them in oral language. These are Mexican-American children who speak both English and Spanish, but yet my course is designed to emphasize oral language development. In essence, it is really second dialect teaching, but we do present dialogs to the children. We even present some pattern drills although we try not to carry this to extremes. We use a lot of audio-visuals by which the students' vocabulary is being expanded. Fourth, we do linguistic analysis. We record children and analyze their language, breaking it down into its basic components, phonology, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary. Then we say that if these children are bilingual, let's see exactly what that means. Let's see what we mean in the area of phonology. How well does he control the sound system of Spanish? Which areas does he have problems with? If he says leshe instead of leche or estógamo instead of estómago, what does this tell us in the area of phonology? If a child uses truje or vide on a tape, what does this tell us about morphology? My whole emphasis in trying to get the students to do this is to convince them that these kids do have a knowledge of the Spanish language, and we are trying to teach them another form based on what they already know. This is basic. I am also trying to convince my students primarily that these kids do have a much better control of the Spanish language than they have been led to believe. We work on vocabulary lists, we study the whole area, the whole linguistic concept of standard versus nonstandard language; so all these are taken from the foreign language field. Of course, we get into other areas as well, mathematics, social studies, science, which are not strictly speaking bilingual education. Now, that is the situation that we are involved in.

What can you as foreign language teachers do? I would offer the following suggestions. I think that the sharing of the expertise that the foreign language field has acquired all these years can be shared very effectively with the people in bilingual education. You are the ones who have all of this experience, beginning in 1958 when the NDEA was passed; you attended the institutes. Yes, I know — I realize a lot of mistakes have been made and we have done our thinking in terms of how we teach a second language, but what is happening right now in the field of bilingual education is that I see them making some of the same mistakes that we were making back in the sixties; so why not share this expertise and not let people grope around and reinvent the wheel? Here we are talking not only about methods, but also about learning theory — some of the things that have been discussed at this conference in terms of some of this latest research in second language teaching. We are talking about second language teaching for the teaching of English as a second language. What is the relationship between the home dialect of the child and the dialect that is being taught in the school?

What is the best way for expanding the child's knowledge of his home language in such a way that he feels proud of it?

At the college and university level I would suggest (and I know very often when I do this some people's hair stands on end) that either one or two departments engage in interdepartmental teaching, that is, between the foreign language department and the department of education. I know this is not done in many cases because the foreign language people look down on the people in the department of education, and the department of education people say that the foreign language people are up in the clouds. So there is not even any contact between the two. But what I am suggesting is, if possible, to start some kind of dialog between these two departments, because it is absolutely vital if your college or university does not have a teacher preparation program. I realize that here people start going on ego trips as to whether it's going to be located in the department of foreign languages or in the department of education. This is something that is purely internal that will have to be resolved, but if dialog does not start, a program will never get off the ground. I think that you as foreign language people should take the initiative in this.

If you are a high school teacher and there is a college or university in your area that doesn't have such a program, why not begin discussion with them? If it is not you, I do not think anybody else is going to do it. Secondly, if a bilingual program already exists in your college or in your school district, explore it. Find out what services you can render the language component. I go out into these programs and see that there is absolutely no communication between the Spanish department at the high school level and the bilingual program. Why? Who knows? In other words here is Spanish and here is bilingual and there is no communication, and yet very often the individuals working in the bilingual program are needing the expertise that the foreign language people have to offer.

For high school personnel, find out about the objectives of the bilingual program and offer your services. Very often there are curriculum guides being written in the bilingual section that have great implications for you and vice versa. Some of the curriculum guides that I see remind me of the things that we used to do back in the late fifties and early sixties. We have already been through this and here we are making the same mistakes all over again.

As you may or may not know, at the elementary school level, local school districts right now can provide endorsement to their bilingual education teachers. Among other things the school district must give a Spanish exam. These exams vary from very good to disastrous, and by disastrous I am referring specifically to some of the ones where the teacher is asked to translate a first or second grade Spanish book into English. Now, this does not tell me whether that individual can actually produce in the language, but yet it is being done and it is very unfortunate. However, there are some

testing situations where the high school teacher sits on the committee to help interview the future bilingual teachers and to recommend or not recommend endorsement. Another area where you can assist is with the effort that the state is engaged in now in language teaching for the bilingual teacher. This is being handled through the Texas Education Agency, the regional service centers, and some universities. Both bilingual and monolinguals are learning Spanish.

At the college or university level another area of possible linkage is to offer special foreign language courses for bilingual education majors. Here I am referring to special sections of Spanish for Mexican-Americans, and by these I mean advanced courses, not "rinky dink" courses at the freshman level. For example, at The University of Texas, advanced composition and dialectology are being offered for Mexican-Americans. There are many areas here where you can offer your expertise. I think that you at the college level should advise your Spanish majors to get certification. In many cases they do not; they simply go and get a B.A. in Spanish and then they get out and say, "What do I do with it?" They should get at least high school certification and later they can move into the area of elementary education much more easily. Either at the high school or college level, diversify the course offerings. Offer alternatives to literature, and here I am referring to such things as culture courses. I notice that the El Paso Independent School District one time was offering something called "La mujer hispánica" at the high school level. Not everyone wants to study literature, with all due respect to literature majors.

Another suggestion I would say is our own attitude toward native speakers of Spanish in Texas. The foreign language field is notorious for putting down native speakers of Spanish. In other words we have taken on a very elitist attitude, and instead of attracting large numbers of Spanish speakers into our classes we usually drive them away because we are very concerned with grammatical analyses and hypercorrection. We need to recognize the dynamics of language variation, within a variety of social contexts. Belittling a student is not going to help anybody. I think that teachers of Mexican-Americans in Texas do have this responsibility.

I would say that the final recommendation as far as your role in the field of bilingual education is a sympathetic attitude toward bilingual education. Don't look at bilingual education as a watered-down foreign language program — it isn't. I think that bilingual education can be the mechanism for generating a whole new attitude in the United States toward non-English languages spoken here. I think that it is also vital in creating a whole new generation of students who are proficient in a language other than English. Students who have had a positive experience with a non-English language cannot but have a tremendous influence on our university and high school programs in the future. I think that the whole area of language teaching is central to bilingual education, and if we who are now involved in bilingual education do not call on the foreign

language field, I think we would be doing a disservice to the whole area. I would urge you who are in the area of foreign languages to make yourselves known, to take the initiative, and to come forth and say, "Look, we have a lot to offer and I think it would be a good idea if you listen to us." Thank you very much.

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